Profile of an Angry Nixon

7-20-74

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A remarkable glimpse of Richard M. Nixon in the pre-Watergate days, raging at his subordinates and the bureaucracy with demands that heads roll and threats of exile to "unpleasant place," emerged yesterday from a newly disclosed section of White House tape transcripts.

It was a strikingly different presidential personality which emerged from the April, 1971, episode than the vague, uncertain figure portrayed in the initial White House tape transcripts. If he was thought to be a Milquetoast in his post-Watergate incarnation, then he acted more in the spirit of Capt. Queeg in the pre-Watergate period.

"We have no discipline in this bureaucracy," the President protested in the April 19 meeting at the White House. "We never fire anybody. We never reprimand anybody. We never demote anybody.

"We always promote the sons-of-bitches that kick us in the ass."

As the President surveyed the horizon he saw himself encircled by nose-thumbing bureaucrats and apathetic agencies.

"When a bureaucrat deliberately thumbs his nose, we're going to get him," the President told John D. Ehrlichman, his domestic counselor, and

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George P. Shultz, his Secretary of Treasury. " . . . The little boys over in State particularly, that are against us, will do it. Defense, HEW—those three areas particularly.

"They've got to know that if they do it, something's going to happen to them . . . There are many unpleasant places where Civil Service people can be sent."

In the case of one offender, an unidentified Small Business Administration official, the President demanded: "Demote him, or send him to the, send him to the Guam regional office. There's a way. Get him the hell out."

As though to demonstrate his point, the President picked up the phone and applied the flail to his deputy attorney general, Richard G. Kleindienst, for pressing the government's appeal of its antitrust case against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp.

"I want something clearly understood, and if it is not understood, McLaren's ass is to be out within one hour," the President snapped. (Richard McLaren was the chief of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division.) "The ITT thing—stay the hell out of it. Is that clear? That's an order."

Either McLaren stops running around "prosecuting people raising hell about conglomerates, stirring things up" or he resigns, the President scathingly warned. "I'd rather have him out anyway. I don't like the son-of-a-bitch."

(Nonetheless, the President later Awarded McLaren a lifetime federal judgeship and praised his handling of the ITT merger case.)

The President was equally unsparing in his appraisal of other civil servants. Speaking of the offending man from SBA, Mr. Nixon proclaimed: " . . . The head is got to roll . . . but the main point is . . . as I told Haldeman, it's got to be done with publicity.

"And let him roll . . . as a warning to a few other people around in this government, that we are going to quit being a bunch of God damn soft-headed managers."

Although the target of the President's wrath was not identified, former SBA California regional director Donald McLarnen was transferred out of the job in 1971 because of a controversy over the processing of emergency grants to victims of the February, 1971, earthquake that struck Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

The view of the President as revealed in the 1971 tapes depicts a man who operated in the imperative tense, whatever the problem or provocation.

When the conversation turned to rising burglary and robbery rates, the President demanded of Ehrlichman that something be done about muggings.

"Let's try to knock that down," he exorted. "That's where we had a responsibility."

"Right," Ehrlichman answered.

". . . and then blame the states for failing to knock this down," the President added.

"We can, we can do that," Ehrlichman assured.

The President decreed, in rapid-fire over the crime problem in the District of Columbia as well as action on drugs —to "show the radicals something."

He received further assurances from Ehrlichman that the administration was moving forward against radical bombers, Weathermen, the Berrigan brothers and other disturbers in the White House catalogue of public nuisances in 1971.

His mood in those days appeared to be one of determination to show that he was the boss. He wanted, as he put it, to "let people know that when they don't produce in this administration, somebody's ass is kicked out."

In another segment of conversation during the same period, on March 23, 1971, Mr. Nixon expressed a sense of being overwhelmed with the problems of the cities.

All cities, he said, are corrupt. When a country loses its rural heartland "it almost always follows that it loses its character."

The occasion was the day that Mr. Nixon met with dairy leaders to discuss increased price supports for milk. On that day the President mused to his staff that as the country "gets more and more intelligent, they get more and more fearful . . . That's what happened to the Greeks, and what happened to the Romans, it's what's happened to the British."

Mr. Nixon even offered the dairymen a medical nostrum which he urged that they get into their promotional programs.

"Almost any, any, person who really studies sleep will tell you probably that ,that, that lacking a pill . . . the best thing you can do is milk.

"Any kind of thing, you can just, just a glass of milk. You don't have to talk with it or anything like that. It could be warm. It could be, uh, tepid, or it could be cold, but . . . it has a certain soothing effect."